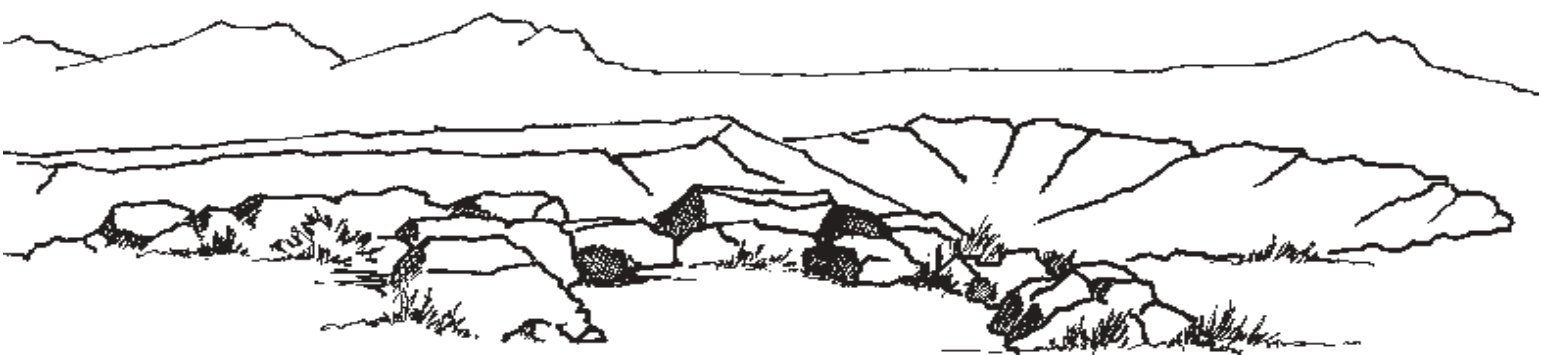


Petroglyph



Petroglyph National Monument was set aside in 1990 to protect and preserve one of the largest petroglyph concentrations in North America and is managed cooperatively by the National Park Service and the City of Albuquerque Open Space Division. It features more than 25,000 highly fragile petroglyph images pecked into dark boulders along the volcanic cliffs of the West Mesa escarpment. Petroglyphs are cultural images pecked into rock surfaces that can still be viewed in their original context. They possess deep spiritual significance for today’s Pueblo Indians and other native peoples. The most heavily visited and easily accessible petroglyphs in the national monument are found here at Boca Negra Canyon. To protect these petroglyph resources and maximize enjoyment during your visit to Boca Negra, please remember:



- Do not touch petroglyphs—body oils can mar them.
- Vandalism is a serious federal crime.
- Stay on trails to prevent erosion.
- Refrain from removing rocks, plants, or resources of any kind.
- Pets are not allowed.
- Respect local cultural groups as you enjoy your visit.

The West Mesa escarpment is a 17-mile long cliff of dark basalt boulders created by six volcanic eruptions occurring about 130,000 years ago. When the volcanoes erupted, liquid lava—ranging between 5 and 50 feet thick—flowed down old arroyo channels, forming peninsulas, and then flowed around hills that have since eroded away to form canyons. This unusual geological landscape is called reverse topography. Later flows of thicker lava formed the now extinct volcanic cones to the west that can be seen from the mesa top.



During the millennia that have followed the lava flows, softer soils under the basalt caprock have eroded so that boulders have broken away and tumbled down to create the escarpment edge. Water, sun, heat, cold, and microbial action have oxidized minerals in the basalt, producing a thin patina of dark desert varnish. When people have pecked or chipped into this dark surface to create petroglyphs, they have exposed the lighter-colored rock beneath. Many older petroglyphs have begun to darken over the centuries.

The volcanic escarpment contains sandy soils and a richer habitat than the surrounding desert landscape. A wider variety and greater number of plants, insects, birds, and reptiles are found here—which in turn have attracted people to the area from earliest times.



Plants commonly seen here are four-wing saltbush, sand sage, rabbitbrush, snakeweed, indigo bush, wildflowers, Indian ricegrass, and other dune-loving flowers and grasses. Also present are hawks, owls, turkey vultures, roadrunners, flycatchers, and a wide variety of migratory birds, along with rabbits, snakes, lizards, and millipedes. Checklists of flora and fauna species are available at the visitor center.

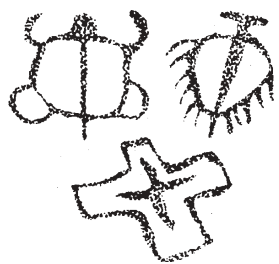
No one can say for sure what many petroglyphs portray. Native peoples may hold complex and widely varying interpretations of many images, depending upon context. Sometimes images are identified on the basis of contemporary cultural interpretations. It is not always appropriate to even reveal the meanings of images.

Archeologists believe that many petroglyphs in the Rio Grande valley—including those in the Canyon Trail area at Boca Negra—date back at least 3000 years. Relative ages can be estimated on the basis of the darkness of the image, its style or content, and comparisons with prehistoric pottery designs or wall paintings.

Perhaps 90% of the petroglyphs in the monument were created using the Rio Grande style, which developed about A.D. 1300, and continued until the end of the 1600s. During this period, the local population increased rapidly, and adobe pueblo villages were constructed along the river and in the foothills of the Sandia Mountains. Images of the Rio Grande style include human figures such as flute players or dancers; masks and masked figures; human hands and feet; animals including mountain lions, birds, serpents, reptiles, insects, and animal tracks; spirals, four-pointed stars, and geometric designs.

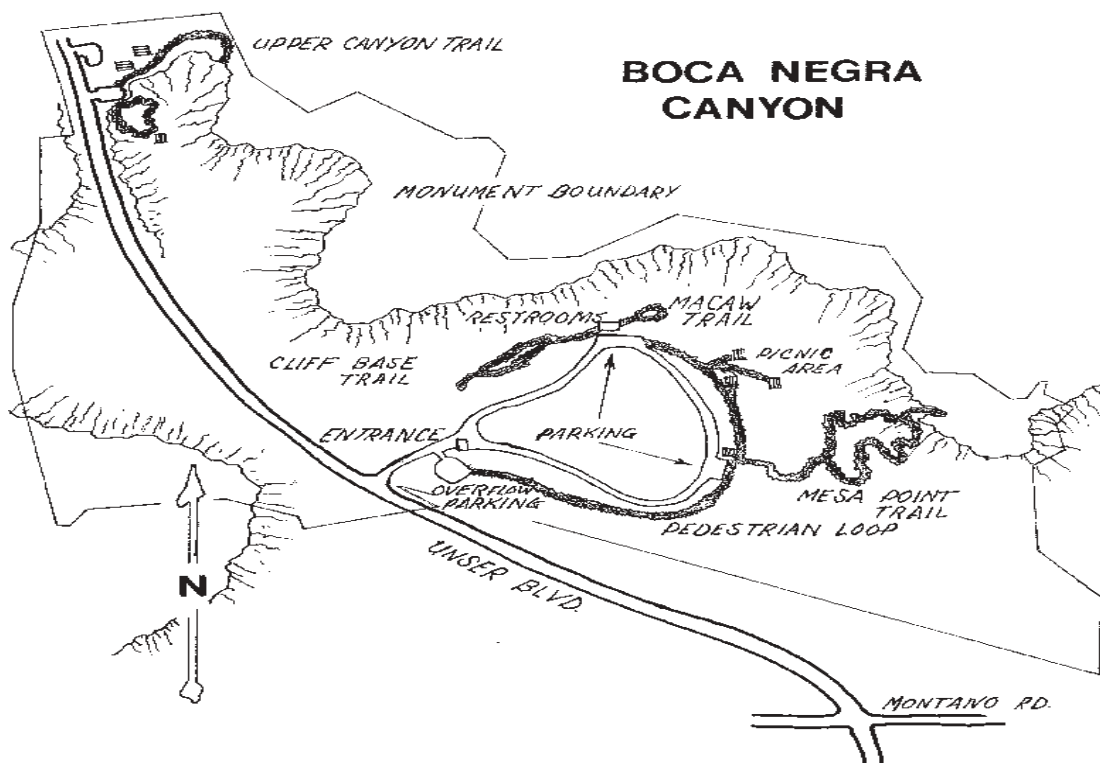


People have lived in the Rio Grande valley for over 10,000 years. First came nomadic hunting and gathering tribes, followed around A.D. 500 by peoples who constructed the first agricultural villages. Early dwellings were small underground structures called pithouses, but by A.D. 1000, people were constructing above ground buildings with multiple rooms called pueblos.



A severe drought struck the Southwest between A.D. 1275 and 1300, causing the people to gather in areas that offered permanent water sources and good farmland, such as the Rio Grande valley. They built numerous adobe pueblos—some of them two or three stories tall—on both sides of the river, and raised crops and domesticated animals such as turkeys and dogs. They also developed new types of pottery on which glaze paints were applied to red or tan backgrounds. These early Pueblo peoples were the direct ancestors of Pueblo Indian peoples who still live along the Rio Grande, and in western New Mexico and eastern Arizona.

Francisco Vasquez de Coronado led the first European expedition to contact Pueblo villages in the Southwest, and spent the winters of 1540-1542 along the west bank of the Rio Grande. Soon, conflicts with the newcomers began to frighten the local native peoples away. In 1598, Juan de Oñate brought the first colonists to New Mexico. Between 1610 and 1680, Hispanic settlement of the Rio Grande valley increased, and former Indian lands were divided into land grants. In 1680 Pueblo Indians united in a revolt that drove out Spanish colonists. The Spanish returned to New Mexico in 1692 and soon thereafter, the Atrisco Land Grant was established for settlement in the Rio Grande Valley. Shepherders from Atrisco carved many images of Christian crosses, sheep, and livestock brands along the escarpment. The Atrisco community retains ties to the escarpment, to the mesa top, and to the lands at the southern end of the monument.



What is today the Boca Negra unit of Petroglyph National Monument was originally established in 1973 as Indian Petroglyph State Park. Although it contains fewer than 5% of all petroglyphs in the national monument, the Boca Negra unit is the most heavily visited facility. The trails in Boca Negra Canyon have been designed to provide opportunities for viewing petroglyphs, and to reduce impacts on the escarpment. Three paved trails (Mesa Point, Cliff Base and Macaw) of varying difficulty provide wayside signs that interpret images and their context. Restrooms, water, and picnic shelters are also available. A fourth unpaved trail in the upper area of Boca Negra (Canyon Trail) offers visitors a more secluded and strenuous hike.

Boca Negra is only one of the three geographic units dividing the 7,236 acres of Petroglyph National Monument. The Piedras Marcadas unit is the farthest north, and contains many petroglyph images that are relatively easy to reach, although parking has not yet been developed in the area of Golf Course Road and Paradise Blvd. Rinconada Canyon, within the Atrisco unit, provides a trailhead with restroom, and offers more seclusion than other units but requires a 2½-mile round-trip walk over unpaved trails to reach the large petroglyph concentrations at the head of the canyon. No water nor services at Rinconada Canyon. The volcanoes can be reached from Paseo del Volcan by a moderately strenuous hike over improved but unpaved trails. Most parts of the national monument can only be reached on foot, and visitors are advised to always bring hiking shoes, hat, sunscreen, and water, and to let others know before setting out. Any hardships encountered in visiting the more remote areas of the monument are offset by the countless rewards to be had.

